

Chapter 16

## **Socioeconomics**

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## Chapter 16

# Socioeconomics

This chapter provides a brief discussion of socioeconomic factors as they relate to the proposed action. Additional analysis relevant to this topic is provided in Chapter 17 (*Environmental Justice*), which addresses the potential for disproportionate effects on minority and low-income communities, as well as Chapter 3 (*Land Use and Planning*), Chapter 4 (*Agricultural Resources*), Chapter 15 (*Recreation*), and Chapter 19 (*Growth Inducement and Related Effects*).

NEPA and CEQA requirements for the analysis of social and economic impacts differ somewhat. NEPA requires that an EIS consider social and economic effects if they are related to effects on the natural or physical environment, and the NEPA definition of *effects* includes social and economic factors (40 CFR 1508.8, 1508.14). However, the intent of NEPA is that social and economic effects alone should not trigger preparation of an EIS (40 CFR 1508.14). CEQA requires analysis of a proposed project's potential impacts on population growth and housing supply, but social and economic changes are not considered environmental impacts in and of themselves under CEQA, although they may be used to determine whether a physical change is significant or not. CEQA also permits discussion of social and economic changes that would result from a change in the physical environment and could in turn lead to additional changes in the physical environment (CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15064[f]).

As discussed in Chapter 4 (*Agricultural Resources*) and Chapter 15 (*Recreation*), the proposed action and action alternatives have some potential to result in conversion of agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses, and in loss or reduction of recreational opportunities. Although these impacts are identified as less than significant, with no mitigation required, this EIS/EIR is nonetheless required under NEPA and the policies of the California State Resources Agency to evaluate any potential socioeconomic effects of these changes in use.

Mitigation for socioeconomic effects is typically identified when a proposed action would directly or indirectly result in

- substantial changes in the availability of employment, housing, or services;
- substantial effects on the economic base of the region or state; or
- displacement of a substantial number of people or existing housing units, such that replacement housing in another location would be needed.

However, the socioeconomic effects of the proposed action and action alternatives are expected to be minimal. Neither the proposed action nor the action alternatives would reduce the availability of housing or services<sup>1</sup>, nor are they expected to substantially reduce the availability of employment opportunities in any of the action area counties. There is some (minor) potential for new construction to result in the loss of a small number of agricultural jobs if agricultural lands are converted to HCP compensation use or if line extensions or substation expansion activities covered by the HCP occur. However, because the acreage involved would be very limited, the number of jobs potentially lost, if any, would also be very small, and the overall direct effect on local and regional job availability would be minimal. The indirect effect on the local and countywide economic base would also be minimal. Finally, even if HCP compensation requirements required acquisition of privately owned lands for mitigation, the overwhelming preference would be for lands that do not support residential uses, and PG&E would not exercise eminent domain to acquire mitigation lands; lands would only be purchased from willing sellers under terms agreeable to all parties. Thus, mitigation needs could conceivably result in the displacement of a small number of rural residences over the 30-year permit term, but the effect relative to the need for relocation housing would be minor, any displacement would involve willing sellers and would be fully compensated, and no need for additional mitigation is anticipated.

Under the No Action Alternative, no HCP would be implemented, and ESA compliance would continue to be accomplished on a case-by-case basis. Consequently, any changes by comparison to existing conditions would be negligible.

**In summary, the proposed action's socioeconomic effects would be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.**

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<sup>1</sup> The potential to *increase* the availability of housing and utility services is addressed as a growth-related effect in Chapter 19.